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SUBJECT: MORE TROOPS IN KANDAHAR? DEPENDS ON WHAT'S ALREADY THERE

REF: KABUL 3733

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Over a two-week period in November, personnel from Regional Platform/South (RP/S) spoke with Kandahari government and security officials, and collected reactions from a range of Afghans across the province to assess whether people felt an increase in U.S. troops in their area would contribute to their security. While these results are largely anecdotal, responses and opinions were wide-ranging. Overall, people from areas that are currently less influenced by the insurgency generally felt positive about increased troop levels, but only if they were deployed in conjunction with the ANSF, and with development and infrastructure aid. Areas under greater insurgent sway fear that more troops will lead to greater violence and destabilization of their areas, and advocated a more local form of community defense. End summary.

KANDAHAR CITY OFFICIALS

¶2. (SBU) Governor Wesa said that troops were necessary to secure projects and jobs, but that it would be possible to do so with the current contingent. He said development projects for job creation should take precedence. He added, however, that there had been a marked increase in activity in the bazaar and around the city over the last few months, which could be attributed to the expectation that more troops and more development projects were forthcoming. Mayor Haider Hamidi said people were concerned that more U.S. troops in the city would lead to increased civilian casualties and adverse effects on Afghan culture and religion.

¶3. (SBU) General Sardar Mohammad Zazai, the police chief, said the city needed more troops, but it did not matter whether they were American or ANSF. He quoted an Afghan proverb: "If you give a person an apple, it doesn't matter what tree it comes from," and added, "If we can provide security to the people of this city and province they will accept forces." He also hoped that more U.S. troops would provide the environment for Afghan security forces to receive better equipment and training. "As soon as we can stand on our own two feet, we will ask you to leave," he said. "But right now we cannot do our job without you."

¶4. (SBU) Col. Mir Ali, the new National Directorate of Security (NDS) chief for the province, said, "It isn't about more or less forces, it is what we do with them." For example, he said, the people do not like house searches done at night. If more forces were to come and perform more searches in that manner, he said, that would cause a greater rift between the people and the security forces, and ultimately be counterproductive. "But," he added, "more important than adding troops is bringing development projects that employ people."

KANDAHAR CITY POPULATION

¶5. (SBU) Professionals and educated business owners in the city generally expressed support for a troop increase, believing that if

allocated in the right way, additional troops would add to security in the city and strengthen the hand of the government. They also advocated the use of the troops to accelerate the training of Afghan security forces. Some warned, though, that the way powerbrokers are treated will make a big difference. A local translator said, "The international community enabled the warlords to make a comeback. I am concerned that more troops will provide more support for warlordism." (Septel) Shopkeepers said they had increased their own presence in the bazaar downtown because of the slight increase in troops that has already occurred, as well as the expectation of more troops forthcoming. Noori Taimoor, an Afghan journalist living in Kandahar City, said that instead of a troop increase, the U.S. should focus on the reconciliation process, and preventing militants from coming into the city. "People believe that coming in with more weapons, vehicles and artillery is a sign of destruction, not of peace," he said.

16. (SBU) The view of women. Rangina Hamidi, who runs a women's cooperative making Afghan handicrafts, heads a small women's shura once a week. Uniformly, she says, the cooperative would welcome more U.S. troops. "We have been waiting for an increase in troops," she said, saying they began feeling much more secure when the Canadians started doing foot patrols at night through the city several months back, conducting house patrols in conjunction with the ANA. "We would rather have American soldiers searching our houses than Afghan ones," she said.

17. (SBU) Ordinary people in the city showed dissatisfaction with the involvement of international troops in the city to date, with many saying that more troops would lead to more civilian casualties. Some said the security situation has gotten worse over the past few years, since international troops first came in, and conclude that

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more troops will result in even more instability. Many suggested that instead of sending more troops, the international community should try to provide more jobs. A cleaner at the Provincial Governor's compound said, "Three years ago I could travel by road to Kabul without a problem, but today I can't because the highways are controlled by the insurgents. I don't think that more troops will help." One vendor at a local bazaar said, "More troops will be bad because the convoys will damage our roads, and will hinder our ability to move freely around." Another said: "More troops will make the topak salars (warlords) more powerful."

Arghandab

18. (SBU) The reaction of people in the Arghandab to the prospect of more troops depended largely on how much insurgent influence already existed in their areas. In the district headquarters and the safer areas on the eastern side of the river, people supported the idea of more troops, as long as they came with more development and income opportunities, as they identified unemployment as the source of Taliban recruitment. They associate increased troops with increased money and development aid, even as they remain critical of conventional forces performing house searches, and of any more civilian casualties from air attacks. On the west side of the river, where there is more Taliban influence, locals expressed support for the Special Forces units that have implanted themselves in villages, and suggested multiplying the reach of these small teams and increasing their connection to the ANSF. They also seemed supportive of the Community Defense Initiative (CDI) concept of defense forces made up of locals and supported by the Special Forces.

Maywand

19. (SBU) In Maywand, still considered a Taliban stronghold, locals were adamantly against an increase in foreign troops, instead advocating the use of traditional forces for local defense. Elders and tribal chiefs of Azabad Village, about 50 miles west of Kandahar City, supported the establishment of organized neighborhood watch forces. Mohammed Nabi Kujani, a tribal elder, said he would only support an increase of troops if they were from Islamic countries. Hajji Sardar Mohammed, another elder, agreed, and said that he would only support a police force in his area if they were recruited from the same neighborhood. The deputy chief of police, Abdul Manan,

admitted there was little security in the area, but said that a troop increase would not help. He asked for more ANP recruitment, and more resources put toward training and equipping of police instead.

Spin Boldak

¶10. (SBU) The village of Lowy Karez, approximately one hour northeast of Spin Boldak center, sits astride one of the key illicit transit routes for insurgents and narco-trafficking to and from Pakistan. Since unimpeded insurgent and criminal trafficking through the territory poses a continued threat to security across the south and country-wide, the Stryker Brigade identified it as a potential combat outpost site. During a shura held in the village about whether to increase troops in the area, locals expressed concern that an expanded security posture, either by ISAF or the ANSF, would lead to insurgent and criminal violence and the victimization of residents by both sides. A local tailor said, "If you come here and something happens to your men, then you'll blame the village." While village elders would appreciate greater security and access to government services (e.g. education, which is not currently available due to intimidation), they are afraid that if the forces leave in the long run, residents will be at even greater risk of retaliation in the future. But as an elder eventually concluded, "We don't have the power. If you want to send troops, what can we do?"

¶11. (SBU) One of the two ABP commanders present, Khodi Nazar, was one of the few who spoke openly in support of setting up a combat outpost, saying it would allow more of a government presence and development assistance, and criticizing village elders for not doing enough to halt Taliban influence. About 10 days later, he was gunned down with four of his men. The Taliban took responsibility.

¶12. (SBU) Comment: The wide range of views - at times contradictory - on the possible troop increase demonstrates the complexity of the decision, and the considerable wisdom of Afghans from "the man on the street" to the highest ranking provincial officials in Kandahar. Many of the well-considered responses are a good reminder that Kandaharis (like many Afghans) understand the potential consequences of various options being discussed in Afghanistan, and that many recognize the efforts and progress already underway by the U.S. Government. End Comment.